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SAIUNKOKU MONOGATARI 24

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第24話

THAT REMINDS ME, KOUYUU-DONO, WHEN WILL THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AFFAIRS' TEST BE HELD?
I HAVEN'T RECEIVED ANY NOTIFICATIONS, BUT I HEARD THAT IT WILL BE HELD LATER THAN USUAL.
AH... THE NOTIFICATION WILL ARRIVE SOONER OR LATER.
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The Ministry of Civil Affairs' test
is for scholars who have passed the earlier exam and is designed to allocate them to different departments.
RUMOR HAS IT THAT THEY JUDGE MAINLY BY THE PERSON'S PERSONALITY. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO PASS THE TEST, YOU CANNOT ASSUME THE ROLE OF A GOVERNOR.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs has the power to decide the future of the scholars, hence the power to sway the whole court.
Therefore, it has the power of about six departments added together.
IS THAT SO...? SO THIS YEAR'S INTAKE OF TOP 20 SCHOLARS WOULDN'T HAVE TO TAKE THE TEST BUT THEY WOULD HAVE TO STAY AT THE COURT FOR FURTHER OBSERVATION?
I HEARD THAT THEY USED THIS METHOD OCCASIONALLY DURING MY FATHER'S ERA.
YES. IT HAPPENED WHEN I BECAME A SCHOLAR, AND WHEN KOUYUU FIRST CAME TO LIVE WITH US.
TIN THE SIX DEPARTMENTS ARE A GENERAL TERM FOR THE DEPARTMENTS WHO IMPLEMENTS GOVERNMENT POLICIES.
AHHH, IT'S A VERY WISE METHOD, AND WE CAN ALSO WAIT FOR THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITY.
THEY, ESPECIALLY TO EIGETSU AND KOU SHUUREI, WOULD NEVER BE ACCEPTED IF WE GO ACCORDING TO THE NORMAL METHOD OF CATEGORIZING THEM INTO THEIR DEPARTMENTS.
IT'D BE A SHAME IF THEY WERE TO BE DESTROYED LIKE THIS.
The Minister of Civil Affairs
Kou Reishin
TIN· MINISTER. THE ONE WHO WIELDS THE LARGEST POWER IN EACH OF THE SIX DEPARTMENTS. HIS DEPUTY IS THE ASSISTANT MINISTER

OF COURSE I WOULD. I HATE WEAKLINGS, SPOILT BRATS AND IDIOTS THE MOST.
OF COURSE, IT INCLUDES THE YOU IN THE PAST.
YOU WOULDN'T ABANDON PEOPLE THAT YOU THINK LACK POTENTIAL AND JUST LET THEM BE DESTROYED, WOULD YOU?
A SHAME?
.....
BUT THE CONDITIONS THIS TIME ARE HORRIBLE, IT'S JUST LIKE THROWING NEWLY GROWN SPROUTS INTO WATER
AND LETTING THEM ROT. AND WE HAVEN'T EVEN GOT STARTED ON THEIR OWN TALENTS YET.
HE'S STILL AS STRICT AS BEFORE .....
->HE JUST BRINGS EVERYONE TO THEIR KNEES<- GEEZ.
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BESIDES, YOU MADE ME SAY THESE KIND OF THINGS WITHOUT GETTING ANGRY. THIS TYPE OF APTITUDE IS WORTH RE-
INDEED. I HAVE YET TO SUBMIT TO YOU BUT DON'T MIND ME. I TREATED THE PREVIOUS EMPEROR THE SAME WAY.
THE PERSON WHO I WOULD BOW DOWN TO STILL EXISTS.
.....
HE'S ACTUALLY THAT SHOUKA'S BIOLOGICAL BROTHER... NO WONDER HE'S ONE OF THE PALACE'S SEVEN MYSTERIES .....
YOU WOULDN'T
AS LONG AS SHOUKA AND KOU-YUU ARE STILL BY MY SIDE.
EVEN THOUGH I WANT TO GIVE UP ON YOU AND RETURN TO THE KOU PROVINCE TO LIVE IN SECLUSION.
BUT YOU STILL REMAINED IN THE COURT AS MY EMPEROR. THAT'S ALREADY ENOUGH FOR ME.

ANYWAY REGARDLESS OF SHO TAISHI IF NOT BECAUSE OF BROTHER'S SINCERE REQUEST, I NEVER WOULD HAVE HANDED KOUYUU OVER TO YOU.
.....
AS LONG AS THE DANGER OF DRAGGING THE BOTH OF THEM INTO THIS MESS EXISTS, NO MATTER YOUR LOYALTY, YOU WILL STILL WORK FOR ME.
THAT IS WHY SHO TAISHI PUT YOUR ADOPTED SON AT MY SIDE, RIGHT?
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BUT IF YOU LET KOUYUU REGRET HIS DECISION, I WILL REPLACE YOUR BRAINS IMMEDIATELY. SO PLEASE BE PREPARED.
IF NOT, YOU'D GO AND LIVE IN A SECLUDED PLACE BY THE TIME I TOOK OVER THE THRONE.
TIN SHO TAISHI IS ONE OF THE COURT'S THREE GRAND MASTERS.
...AH, THEN, I'LL BE COUNTING ON YOU.
REGRET?
THERE IS NO SUCH WORD IN MY DICTIONARY.

MINISTER KOU!
A DOCUMENT WILL BE SENT TO EVERYONE ABOUT WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER.
THEN I'LL BE EXCUSING MYSELF.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?
UHM.. THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING THE ROLE OF SHUUREI'S TEMPORARY GUARDIAN.
I WON'T LOSE
STOP
I HOPE YOU'D STOP INTERFERING IN MY PRIVATE AFFAIRS.
IT APPEARS THAT SHUUREI DOES NOT KNOW WHO SPONSORED HER.
IT'S NOTHING...I'M DEFINITELY NOT DOING THIS BECAUSE OF YOU.
NO... ARE YOUR WORDS ESPECIALLY SHARP BECAUSE YOU MISSED THE CELEBRATION FOR SHUUREI BECOMING THE TANKA?
MY LORD...I HAVE NEVER LIKED YOU FROM THE START.

HE HAS SHOUKA-NII BY HIS SIDE TO TEACH HIM UNDER SUCH A UNIQUELY ENDOWED ENVIRONMENT AND HE'S STILL UNAWARE OF IT.
HE ACTS ALL MUDDLE-HEADED AND CAUSES MY BROTHER TO WORRY ABOUT HIM.
EVEN THOUGH MY CUTE NIECE IS NO LONGER HIS CONSORT, HE'S STILL HOVERING AROUND HER
HE'S ACTING DUMB...
BUT EVEN NOW, SHE STILL DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT MY EXISTENCE
AND BROTHER IS STILL GIVING ME THE COLD SHOULDER
I ABSOLUTELY HATE HIM. IF HE WASN'T THE EMPEROR, I WOULD HAVE MURDERED HIM AGES AGO!
HATRED
GULP
HE'S SO ANGRY...
...BUT I ACTUALLY QUITE LIKE YOU.
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...I ACTUALLY TOLD HIM WHAT I HONESTLY FELT.
NEXT TIME, YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED ENTRANCE.
IT'S A HUNDRED YEARS TOO EARLY FOR YOU TO TRY GETTING ME INTO YOUR BED.
SHUURE!
...
SHUURE!! IS SOMEWHERE WITHIN THESE CITY LIGHTS...
SHE'S SO... FAR AWAY.
AND AFTER TODAY, SHE'D BE EVEN FURTHER AWAY FROM ME.

BUT FROM NOW ON, THAT SMILE
SHUUREI'S SMILE EXISTED WITHIN MY REACH.
AN IRREPLACEABLE SMILE.
BEING THE EMPEROR AND A GOVERNOR RESPECTIVELY
ALTHOUGH SHE'S IN FRONT OF ME, IT FEELS LIKE THE GAP BETWEEN US IS GETTING BIGGER AND BIGGER
NO, IT'S MORE LIKE ALL THOSE SINCERE AND BEAUTIFUL EXPRESSIONS ARE HIDDEN WHEN SHE'S BOWING DOWN TO ME
I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT ALLOWING FEMALES TO JOIN THE NATIONAL EXAMS WAS A CORRECT CHOICE
I WILL NEVER
REGRET IT.
FOR SHUUREI TO BECOME A GOVERNOR.
A YEAR AGO
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WHAT I CAN DO IS
SHUUREI ...
FROM NOW ON, I WON'T BE ABLE TO REACH A HELPING HAND OUT TO YOU
NOW, AS LONG AS SHUUREI CONTINUES SMILING, THAT WOULD BE ENOUGH
I HAVE NEVER THOUGHT THAT SOMETHING LIKE THAT WOULD HAPPEN BEFORE THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AFFAIRS' TEST.
FROM THE TIME WHEN KOUYUU-SAMA TOOK THE EXAM, THERE'S ABOUT A SEVEN YEAR GAP... THIS AMOUNT OF TIME...
ACCORDING TO THE LETTER, WE HAVE TO STAY AT THE PALACE TEMPORARILY SO THAT THE SENIORS CAN TEACH US ABOUT OUR VARIOUS DUTIES AS GOVERNOR.
IT WILL PROBABLY BE SOMETHING LIKE A PROBATION PERIOD.
.....
SHUUREI-NEE-SAN SEEMS A LITTLE TROUBLED.
YES... A LITTLE.

LAST SUMMER, I THOUGHT I HAD ONLY ONE CHANCE TO WORK IN THE PALACE SO I DRESSED UP A GUY TO DO IT.
WHAT SHOULD I DO IF IT WAS EXPOSED?
AT THAT TIME, I NEVER WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THERE WOULD BE A DAY WHERE I WOULD BECOME A GOVERNOR.
IF POSSIBLE, I HOPE THAT I WILL NOT BE POSTED ANYWHERE NEAR THE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES
BUT THEY WOULDN'T PLACE THE NEWLY ADMITTED TANKA IN THAT HIGH RANKING PLACE...
?
COULD I ESCAPE IF THE PEOPLE THAT I MET WHEN I WAS AROUND MINISTER KO* WERE INCREDIBLE
TN: MINISTER KO- MINISTRY OF TAXATION AND TREASURY KO KUJIN
EIGETSU ...
IN ANY CASE, I'D STAY BY YOUR SIDE.
LET'S WORK HARD TOGETHER.
SHUUREI-NEE-SAN
HM?
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I PASSED THE INTERVIEW AND THE IMPERIAL EXAMINATIONS THANKS TO EIGETSU AND THE OTHER GUYS.
... ALTHOUGH I'M STILL ANGRY AT THAT RYULIREN
MM.
EIGETSU, YOU'RE SUCH A GENTLE BOY.
EH? WHY?
I HAVE ALWAYS STUDIED ALONE
WHEN I HAD FRIENDS THAT I COULD SHARE MY FEELINGS WITH, I REALLY FELT COMFORTED AND CONTENT.
SO, THANK YOU.
OKAY! RIGHT NOW WE SHOULD STICK OUT OUR CHESTS AND STAND CONFIDENTLY AS WE MARCH FORWARD!
HOW COULD WE FEAR THOSE PEOPLE WHO BELITTLE US!?
YES!

...?
appears suddenly
shock
SEIRAN?
YOU'VE WORKED HARD. FROM NOW ON I* SHALL... NO,
ALLOW ME TO GUIDE YOU THERE.*
TIN: THE 'I' THAT RYUUKI USED HERE IS ONLY FOR THE EMPEROR. ANYONE ELSE WHO USES IT WILL GENERALLY BE CONSIDERED A TRAITOR AND EXECUTED.
TIN: HERE, HE USES A VERY POLITE FORM OF THE COMMONERS' WAY OF ADDRESSING THEMSELVES.
!
WHA..
...WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS KIND OF PLACE!?
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SEE HERE.
BUT WE ARRIVED WAY EARLIER THAN THE GIVEN TIME!
RYUUKI ~~~!!
FORGET ABOUT THAT, WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU WEARING ANYWAY, AREN'T YOU THE EMPEROR..?
.....
IT'S A MISTAKE.
IF YOU DON'T HURRY UP, YOU'LL BE LATE FOR THE ASSEMBLY.
FORGET ABOUT THAT... BOTH OF YOU ARE RATHER LATE.
THE ASSEMBLY STARTS MUCH EARLIER THAN THE TIME WRITTEN IN THE LETTER.
HEY, STOP JOKING AROUND!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
A MISTAKE!?
EH?
WE BOTH MADE THE SAME MISTAKE!?

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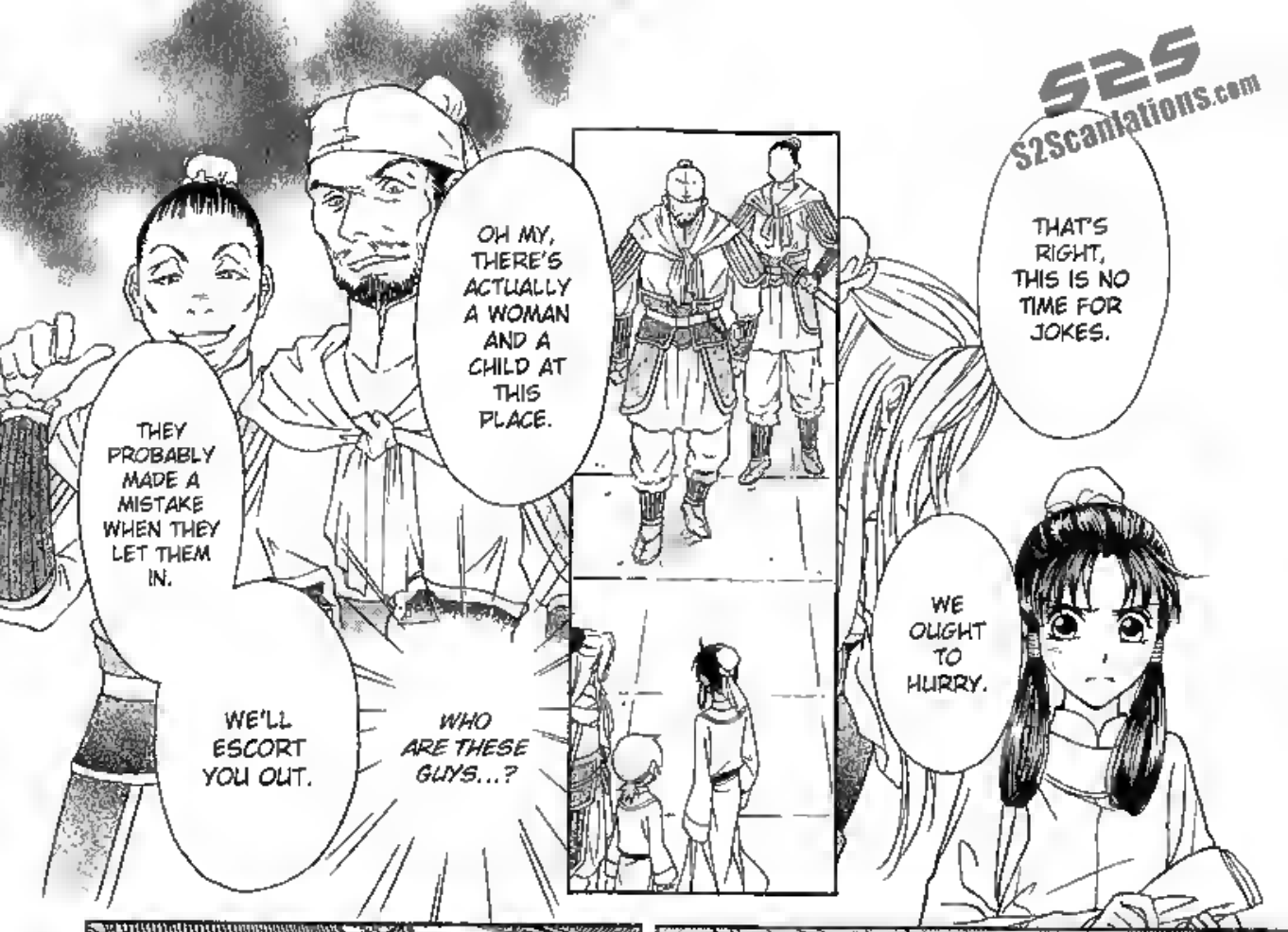
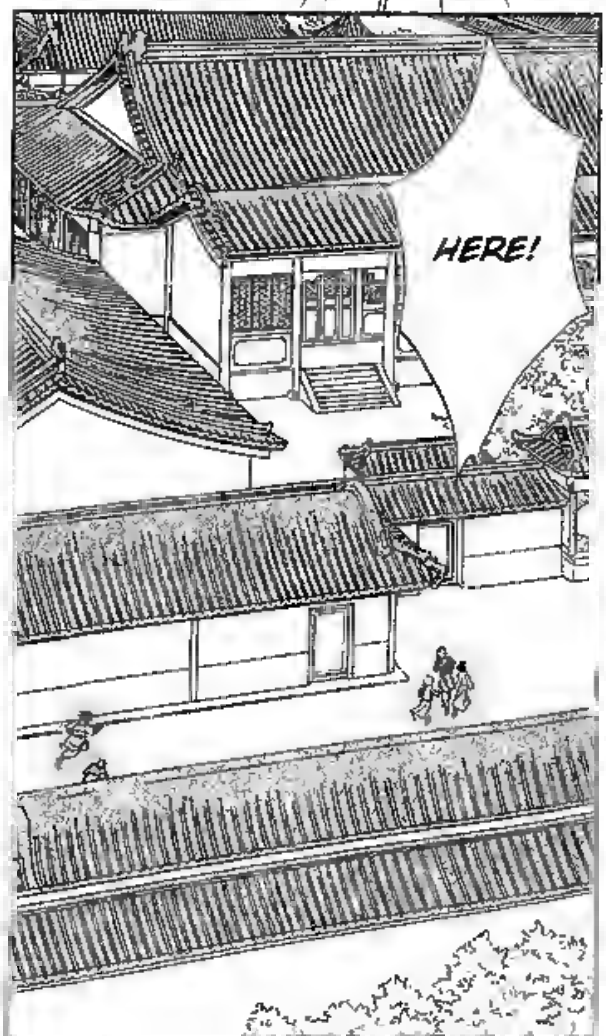
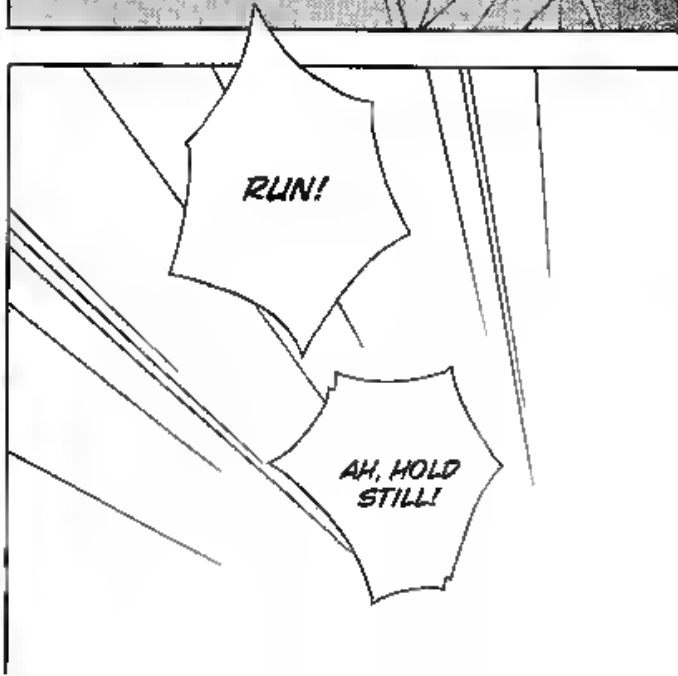

OH MY, THERE'S ACTUALLY A WOMAN AND A CHILD AT THIS PLACE.
THEY PROBABLY MADE A MISTAKE WHEN THEY LET THEM IN.
WE'LL ESCORT YOU OUT.
WHO ARE THESE GUYS...?
THAT'S RIGHT, THIS IS NO TIME FOR JOKES.
WE OUGHT TO HURRY.





I THINK THEY WERE SENT BY PEOPLE WHO DO NOT WANT YOU TO REACH THE PALACE SAFELY.
WHAT'S WITH THOSE GUARDS?
Heavy Footsteps
Heavy Footsteps
WHAT A FREE MAN HE IS TO HIRE SUCH LOW RANKING GUARDS.
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
IF WE CUT ACROSS THAT PATCH OF BUSHES WE'LL REACH OUR DESTINATION FASTER.
SHUUREI-NEE-SAN, HE'S THE EMPEROR.
YOU... JUST DROWN IN THAT POND OVER THERE.
IT'S OKAY, EIGETSU, I'M ALREADY VERY HAPPY WITH THIS.
WHICH REMINDS ME... WHY EXACTLY ARE YOU HERE?

Ahhh
I found them!
IT DIDN'T WORK EVEN THOUGH I PUT IN SO MUCH EFFORT? DO I HAVE TO USE TWO LOVE VOODOO DOLLS?
IF YOU WANT TO SEND ME SOMETHING, JUST SEND ME THE HAY!
THAT WAY, AT LEAST I CAN MAKE NATTO...
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ARE THEY ALREADY MOVING?
WE WON'T BE GETTING ANYWHERE AT THIS RATE.
pant
pant

I...
FROM TODAY ONWARDS, I WILL BE YOUR PERSONAL BODYGUARD.
HUH!?
THAT IS WHAT I AM HERE FOR.
pant
pant
pant
Shock
WE... WE MADE IT.
Footsteps
Footsteps
Footsteps
THE ASSEMBLY HAS NOT BEGUN, HAS IT?
NO, IT HASN'T.

SHIIURE!
WHAT?
AH
I KEPT IT AFTER FLICK-ING IT... I-IT DOESN'T COUNT!
IT'S A BIT LATE, BUT I MUST STILL CONGRATU-LATE YOU ON BEING THIRD.
THIS IS ENOUGH.
THANK YOU. WE'LL BE GOING IN.
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THEY REALLY DON'T KNOW THEIR PLACE.
SHE DIDN'T EVEN USE THE NORMAL METHOD TO BECOME THE TANKA.
...THEY REALLY CAME.
A GIRL TAKING THE NATIONAL EXAM.
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSING IF A FEMALE COULDN'T EVEN PASS THE EXAM. THAT'S WHY THEY LET HER PASS.
NO MATTER WHAT, A HIGH SCHOOL GIRL GOT THIRD PLACE. WHAT DO THEY TAKE OUR HARD WORK FOR ...?
WE SPENT A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT TO GET HERE!
AND YET WE WE'RE BEING SURPASSED BY THOSE EXCEPTIONS.
AND FOR THAT WOMAN TO GET THIRD PLACE, IT'S ENOUGH TO RUIN MY GOOD MOOD.

WHAT A COCKY BRAT.
grip tightly
GEEZ, WHAT CAN A WOMAN DO?
NOT TO MENTION THAT SHE'S JUST A BRAT.
ALL A WOMAN NEEDS TO DO IS TO STAY AT HOME TO SERVE HER HUSBAND AND LOOK AFTER HER CHILDREN.
SHE'S JUST A WOMAN.
RAISE YOUR HEAD
FEEL PROUD THAT YOU ARE A WOMAN
KOUCHOU-NEE-SAN
RYUUKI ...

THE HATEFUL WORDS THAT KEEP ON DIG-GING INTO MY EARS
HATRED
THE COLD GAZES
I HAVE STRENGTH-ENED MY DETERMINA-TION.
I AM PROUD TO BE A WOMAN.
SHUUREI-NEE-SAN
awed
glare

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